Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

UPDATE

Fall 1996 Vol. 1 No. 12

Update, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048, (212) 432-5707, for the purpose of providing current information on New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context.

Editor In Chief: Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D

Senior Editor/
Design & Layout: Emilyn L. Brown

Editors: Marie-Alice Devieux
Deborah Wright

Contributors: Emilyn L. Brown
Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D
Marie-Alice Devieux
Steve B. Harper
Tamara R. Jubilee
Tamara Kelly
Ruth A. Mathis
Chadra D. Pittman
Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D

In This Issue...

Howard University Report: Bridging Past and Future

Compiled by Emilyn Brown

{Part 1 of 2}

Between 1991-92, 427 human remains were excavated from the African Burial Ground and eventually transported to Howard University's Cobb Laboratory. Under the direction of Dr. Michael L. Blakey, the remains have undergone cleaning, reconstruction, data assessment and photographic documentation. Thus far, scientific data compiled for this population indicate high levels of bio-mechanical work stress, malnourishment and a host of related illnesses. Completion of this first phase of the project signals the start of new and challenging research for Howard's scientific team. One of their primary goals in the next phase of the project will be to determine the origins of individuals buried at the site.

One of the steps toward reaching that goal is a comparative study, conducted in August, 1996 by Howard osteological technicians Ena Fox, Alison Davis and Kenya Shujaa at New York's American Museum of Natural History. During their visit, they discussed details of their findings with OPEI and Foley Square staff -- Ama Badu Boakyewa, Emilyn Brown, Jean Cerasale, Donna Harden Cole, Marie-Alice Devieux, Deinabo George, Steve Harper, Tamara Jubilee, Cheryl LaRoche, Doville Nelson, Ruth Mathis, Chadra Pittman and Deborah Wright. So many topics were raised during the session, that a decision was made by Dr. Sherrill Wilson to hold a second session at Howard University, and to publish the major points for the benefit of our readers. Present at this second session were Ena, Kenya and Alison joined by Dr. Michael L. Blakey, and osteological tech assistants Keisha Hurst, Shani Wright, and Joseph Jones.

Emilyn: At this point in the project do the current scientific findings add to or revise our knowledge about this burial population?

Kenya: Most of the things that we've been finding lately in our capacity as osteological technicians are supporting things that we already believed, like how many children there were. There were actually more children than we thought. I think at first it was 40% and now we're at 50%. Another thing is the differences between the males and females. Its very hard to tell because of the work they had to do. A lot of the females are just as robust as the males are.You may be able to tell the difference by looking at the heads of the long bones, but according to these measurements, indications would be that almost everyone was male. We've had to revise part of the sex determination based on that.

Cont. on page 3

"Neither we, nor any other people will ever be respected till we respect ourselves, and we will never respect ourselves till we have the means to live respectably." --- Frederick Douglass

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The African Burial Ground and Human Rights

Dear Dr. Blakey:

On behalf of the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters (CAPSDH), I want to thank you for a most excellent presentation and discussion of the African Burial Ground Project. My colleagues and I were most impressed with the scientific investigation thus far, and look forward to hearing more in the future about your findings.

The academic, human rights, and scientific community in Europe were unaware of the extent of the historical importance of the African Burial Ground to the international community as a whole and especially the African community of nations. Of particular interest are the human rights implications as per international treaties and covenants. We look forward to hearing more about your work. Please keep us informed.

Djely Kanfa Samoura
UN Rep. of the CAPSDH
African Commission of Health
and Human Rights Promoters

Abdelbagl Gabriel
Main Rep.
World Federation
of Democratic Youth

*(**Ed. note:** for further details concerning the presentation on the African Burial Ground made at the Geneva conference, see African Burial Ground Update page 6)*

New Brunswick Burial Site

...I thoroughly enjoy reading Update, but am traveling to Africa and Europe next week for several months. Please remove my name from the mailing list until further notice. However, Mr. Chuck A. Linton, Committee member in New Brunswick, New Jersey, is trying to gain support for his campaign to have that city's government acknowledge the role that Africans and African Americans have played in the town's history. According to him, New Brunswick was once a major slave trading center in New Jersey and there is a site there that was once an auction block.

There are also some graves that have mysteriously disappeared. He wants the auction block and the graves of the Africans buried there to be found, acknowledged, honored...

Sincerely
Madubuko A. Robinson-Diakite'

A Child's Eye View

...Thank you so much for sharing all the information you know. Here is some information we thought was very interesting: 1) we thought it was interesting when you found all these pieces for one cup you would somehow put them altogether. 2) we also thought it was interesting how you told us that all of the graves were facing East. 3) We didn't expect to hear how big the African Burial Ground [was]. 4) We also did not expect to see crab bones, fish bones, cat and dog bones and chicken bones.

Class 316, Bank Street School

*(**Ed. note:** This letter is in response to a tour of the Foley Square Laboratory where artifacts of the African Burial Ground and artifacts from the Five Points excavation are currently on display. The reference to the crab, fish, cat etc. refer to those items excavated from Five Points.)*

Searching out history

...I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Studies, here at the State University of New York at Buffalo. As such, I teach Black Women's Studies, specifically the interconnection between Black women's historical experiences and Black women's writings. Towards that end, my courses (both undergraduate and graduate) attempt to be a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My approach is interdisciplinary, in that I draw from history and literature; as a way of examining Black women's personal and collective lives.

My own research however, leads me to examine the eighteenth century as well. I would greatly appreciate any information you have, or can direct me towards, regarding the specific experiences of enslaved African women and children in what became the urban north (i.e. New York City)...

Respectfully,
Masani Alexis De Veaux, Ph.D.

*(**Ed. note:** OPEI is currently working on a women's bibliography spanning the 18th and 19th centuries -- stay tuned!)*

We at OPEI wish to extend our sincere condolences to Mr. Richard Brown over the recent loss of his wife Mrs. Enid Brown. A primary organizer of the stamp petition campaign, Mr. Brown has collected thousands of signatures toward the goal of obtaining a stamp for the African Burial Ground. In this, and in all his endeavors, he never failed to credit his wife Enid as his source of inspiration and support.

OPEI welcomes letters but reserves the right to edit for length or clarity

Howard University Cobb Laboratory Staff: Front row left to right: M. Cassandra Hill, Cliff Russell, Rachel Watkins, Shani Wright (seated), behind her Michele Yankey, Ena Fox, Alison Davis, Karen Goodwin (seated), Keisha Hurst, Mark Alston, Kenya Shujaa, Andrea Reid. Back row from window at right to left: Mark E. Mack, Joseph Jones, Douglas Fuller, Alan Blanc (in cap). Standing at the extreme left: Dr. Michael Blakey and Jerome Edwards.

Continued from page 1

An example would be the femur [upper thigh bone]. If the mid-shaft circumference is more than 81 millimeters that's supposed to be a male. If its 81 or less its supposed to be a female. Almost all of those measured are at least in the high 80s or 90s. While other sex indicators will show real differences, all over the body you can see strong muscle attachments related to constant work stress. Injured people weren't really given a chance to heal.

Ena: Most of the work I've been doing supports our initial findings in terms of enamel hypoplasia; the enamel not being properly developed because of the disturbances in childhood.

Shani: I think its the way we process and seek the information. I know for me when I started working on the project I was kind of surprised at how we began, looking at the burials not to determine if they were Black or White, but just basic kinds of information. [Previously] I went to a forensic anthropology conference and it was about African and European, male and female. It was not really about looking at the remains and finding out where they came from, who they were. I really enjoy that Dr. Blakey is adamant about pursuing and finding out what part of the continent they were from, other than saying they were "slaves." Most of the time in history books we're never Africans, we're always "slaves."

Emilyn: Right! We constantly stress in OPEI presentations and publications that the word "slave" describes a condition, not a people.

Shani: Yes! and that kind of disturbed me, so I do like that we view the remains in a human way. I'm thinking that this might be a ground breaking project and that others will start viewing projects like this, should they come along, differently.

Keisha: To elaborate on what Shani was saying...I enjoy the tours, all the people that come through the lab to view the bones. You have older folks and students who are curious about the project and they come in and they sort of understand what the project is about and they're coming to gain more knowledge about it. But then you have younger students or children, and I don't think they quite understand what is going on here. I think that Ena and Mark Mack, the laboratory director, get the point across that they are Africans, they are our ancestors and that statement alone cannot be stressed enough.

Joseph: What we've found has revised specifically what we've known, or thought we knew about slavery in the northern part of the United States. Its pretty widely known how things were in the South. But this project shows examples of physical violence in the north such as extreme axial loading which meant carrying things well above the human potential. Things like that have shown us that even in the North where things were thought to be a little less harsh on our ancestors, they weren't. We realize this was not the exception, but maybe the rule. I'm now doing a dual major of anthropology and history. That's how important it was to me in terms of ongoing interaction. I'd like to continue with anthropology because this is the kind of work where you can see concrete examples of things being done that will hopefully make a difference. Sometimes its good to see those kinds of things actually happen. When you have a burial population like this and have students and young children taking a tour. You can see their eyes light up when you tell them about it. That's important.

Michael: I'd have to say that I'm trying to stand back from the project and think about that because for us working in the laboratory, the existing view changes everyday. Let's say that in contrast to the view that we had when the research design was done, the little that we know about the artifacts so far and the dental modification that we've seen make it clearer just how African this population is. The evidence of work and load bearing stress is much more clear cut evidence of the hardships and physical labor than I'd imagined we would find. It represents such severe and widespread injuries. I still want to be cautious about what we say because we are getting so close to the point where we can really provide a sophisticated evaluation of the African Burial Ground population.

→

I really think we should defer a good deal of our judgement, at least until the descriptive report comes out on the total population which is what we are in the process of preparing for now.

Emilyn: Recently, Ena, Alison and Kenya were engaged in a comparative study involving the remains from the African Burial Ground and the Museum of Natural History's skeletal collection. Can you explain to our readers what that entailed and what you hope to gain from it?

Ena: One of the questions we try to answer with this type of research is where people are from, their specific ethnic origin, so we search out knowledge of other cultures. At the Museum of Natural History we examined mostly crania and some other skeletal remains from West African populations labeled Ashanti. Some were labeled from the Gold Coast that could have been related, could have been Ashanti, and people from New York some of whom were identified as Native Americans but not all of them. What we did was to collect data, take measurements and made observations. Part of the reason for that is simply to make comparisons, especially with the Ashanti.

Emilyn: Did you find any parallels between the African Burial Ground population and those you examined in the Museum?

Ena: The only thing I can say right off the bat is that we have a number of individuals in the burial ground population with filed teeth. We're trying to match up filing patterns to determine where they are *from, and a number* of the Ashanti individuals from the American Museum of Natural History collection, about six or seven, also had filed teeth. Mostly men had modified, pointed patterns on their incisors.

Alison: We also made comparisons in the sense of looking and seeing if there were any of the same kinds of injuries, hypoplasia, anything like that to see if this African population was generally healthy and to compare it to our population.

Ena: For example, just to piggyback on what Alison said, looking at the teeth, I noticed that when I looked at the people from West Africa, theirs were very worn. These were not old people necessarily, but their teeth were extremely worn. Yet their teeth were relatively free of cavities overall. Here, with the African Burial Ground population, yes you have tooth wear, but it isn't frequent in that extreme and there are many more cavities, so that says something to me about diet and caries related to health.

Emilyn: Regarding the Museum's collection, has it been around for a while?

Kenya: A lot of the bones were collected in the late 19th or early 20th century. We don't have any information on when the people died, so they may have been there for a while. Another thing is that we looked at the African collections and for the most part there were only crania. There were some post-cranial remains, but we found only two sections of post-cranial remains among the Ashanti, the tibia. As far as we know, there were just crania.

Ena: Another thing of interest is that we did find two or three crania that looked like they had stains from the oxidation of copper shroud pins.

Alison: Some [remains] from the museum's NY collection looked as if they had never been buried. Skeletons look different once they've been in the ground.

Kenya: Some remains looked as if they had been chemically treated in some way. Not just shellac, but the materials that you could see on the bone. They were Gold Coast people, the Ashanti, some of them were in Elmina...I don't understand why they would just take the cranium and not the rest of the body.

Emilyn: You mentioned that human remains in the New York collection were primarily Native Americans?

Kenya: Mostly Native Americans. There were a few Europeans.

Alison: And they were only identified as Native Americans not by any ethnic criteria but by geographic location. We'll be having a specialist in the craniometric area, Dr. Shomarka Keita, who will also look at the measurements and make his conclusions whatever they may be.

Michael: Our technicians measured the crania of nearly 100 skeletons in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History. That was an opportunity afforded us by Dr. Ian Tattersall, who is Chair of the Department of Anthropology and curator of those collections. The largest African collection that they have are Ashanti and our team was able to get many good measurements of those crania. They also measured a series of crania of the Bakongo from Zaire and Angola, and Native Americans that had been excavated from the New York City area.

This is very exciting because we found, although sometimes only in very small numbers, many other individuals from Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Africa, and elsewhere, whose measurements can be compared to the cranial measurements in the African Burial Ground population.

These measurements provide a numerical rendering of the shape of the head and the appearance of the face and although the differences are sometimes slight, different ethnic groups, different cultures, different breeding populations each have a specific range of appearance by which, very often, the people are known. Sometimes you can look at someone's face and know that they're from eastern Europe or East Africa or West Africa without having a tremendous amount of familiarity. The greater the familiarity with people, the greater your ability to know what the differences are.

Cont.on page 5

Dr. Lesley M. Rankin-Hill, Associate Director for Biological Anthropology

Michael L. Blakey, Ph.D.

Lesley Rankin-Hill is a Harlem native, who has devoted much of her anthropological career to the study of African American biological history.[1] She received a B.A. degree at Smith College, and went on to receive both a M.A. and Ph.D. in biological anthropology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Her doctoral dissertation, "Afro-American Biohistory: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations" (1990), is a pioneering work which compares skeletal data in most of the major African American archaeological sites. Dr. Rankin-Hill is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, and a major contributor to the theoretical and methodological development of the African Burial Ground Project.

During the years between receiving a M.A. and Ph.D., Dr. Rankin-Hill taught at the University of the District of Columbia. While in Washington, D.C. she received a Faculty Fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution where she worked with J. Lawrence Angel on the First African Baptist Church (FABC) bioarchaeological project during the mid-1980s. That project was the first collaboration between Dr. Hill, Dr. Blakey, and John Milner Associates. She is currently completing a book based on that project and her dissertation.

Lesley Rankin-Hill is an eclectic scholar. She is as at home with medical issues in living populations as she is with skeletons. She is completing a National Science Foundation-funded project on the biological and cultural aspects of chronic pain in Puerto Rico (her background is partly Afro-Cuban) and has conducted an oral history project in a Latino community in Washington, D.C.

She was one of the last generation of scholars to be mentored by W. Montague Cobb, of whom she is a biographer. Her special skeletal biological expertise is in bone histology (the study of the structure and physiology of the tissues that comprise bone). Lesley Rankin-Hill is married to Seabern Hill, an Administrator at the University of the District of Columbia.

When I asked her why she got involved in anthropology, she said, "I always thought that anthropology was revolutionary. Understanding the origins of human life can help us understand our present and future better. I also felt that people of color should get into anthropology because it can improve our sense of self and sense of empowerment. We need to study ourselves and them."

1 Oops! Some readers have noted that Dr. Rankin-Hill, who has been very significantly involved in the Project's leadership and in Sankofa I, was not mentioned in the Howard University report in Update Vol. 1, No. 10. This profile, the first in a series, will introduce Update readers to Dr. Rankin-Hill and her work — M.L.B.

Howard University Report Cont. from page 4

Michael (cont.): There are many statistical methods that have been used to assess in a systematic way, those differences between facial appearance and shape of the head. This work is being done under the guidance of Dr. Keita who has engaged in research of this kind in various parts of Africa and the Middle East for quite a number of years. So we will need to return to New York at some point and gather data on additional populations because as you know, our interest has always been knowing exactly if possible, the specific cultural group from which the individuals in the African Burial Ground derived.

Statistical methods are often used for race assessment. The individual is then compared to a range of measurements that have been used to define racial groups. We could do that but we feel that is inadequate. By comparing these individuals to a very specific population, not only will we have more information, but we will have then characterized this population in terms of groups of people that have a specific cultural history which is far more meaningful for our study and is also, I expect, how the public understands just how diverse the people of Africa really are. Although there are many commonalities among populations and a great deal of variation within them, each population is distinctive in some way, biologically and culturally.

(End of Part I)

Raising a question...

Many museums and universities, such as Howard, have skeletal collections that are routinely used by anthropologists for research and teaching purposes. In the absence of historical documention for the African Burial Ground, skeletal collections such as those housed by the Museum of Natural History, have become crucial in helping to determine the origins of those buried at the site.

But the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), passed in 1990, offers another perspective on this subject. Under this act some Native American groups have challenged, and occasionally, retrieved museum "acquisitions," returning them to their appropriate nations for proper burial when possible. Should African Americans lobby for similar legislation? – E.B.

In the next issue of Update Part II of the Howard University Interview: New Standards / New Directions

African Burial Ground Update

o **U.N. Briefed on African Burial Ground**
At a August 14, 1996 briefing session held at U.N. Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, Imam Muhammad Hatim, African Burial Ground advocate, voiced collective concerns regarding the burial site and group rights for African Americans. Representing the Admiral Family Circle, an Islamic Community based in New York and Lift Every Voice, Inc., headquartered in Los Angeles, their human rights agenda also included such issues as the destruction of African American churches and mosques, and police brutality in New York City's Police Department.

Supporters at the Geneva conference include from L to R: Barika Idemke, Nigeria; Juanita Scott, human rights activist; Imam Hatim, Dr. Blakey; and Dr. Komba Kono, Sierra Leone.

During the session, Imam Hatim repeatedly emphasized the point that Africans buried at the site represent the ancestors of millions of Africans on the continent. To underscore this historical bond, Dr. Michael Blakey offered a presentation that outlined current scientific analysis of the remains and the long range goals of the project. A strong show of support among audience members comprised of human rights activists, scientists and U.N. officials led Mr. Hatim to conclude "The audience -- at times intensely serious, sometimes moved to tears and intellectually stimulated by the discussion -- expressed the need for international recognition of the site." The following recommendations were made during the session :

1. That there be joint U.S. and U.N. recognition of the African Burial Ground as an international landmark

2. That an international collaboration take place in which African Americans coordinate the construction of a monument to honor the "formerly enslaved Africans buried at the site, and their descendants."

3. Implementation of the recommendation of Asborn Eide, Special Rapporteur and UN Human Rights expert, that research should be implemented in various African countries to determine the degree to which descendants of persons formerly enslaved continue to suffer (D/CN. 4/Sub.2/1989/8/Add.1, Recommendation 17).

4. Issuance of a UN stamp or several stamps that underscore the dignity and survival of the descendants of enslaved Africans, the sanctity of places of worship, and respect for African/African American Burial Grounds."

o **GSA Retains Consultant for African Burial Ground Memorialization Project.** GSA has contracted Peggy King-Jorde as a consultant and project executive to work toward completion of the memorialization of the African Burial Ground site. According to the press release dated Oct. 11th , "Ms. King-Jorde will coordinate a variety of undertakings related to the memorialization of the exterior site, fabrication of the planned Interpretive Center, and reinterment of the human remains from the African Burial Ground currently undergoing anthropological analysis at Howard University in Washington, D.C."

Peggy has formerly served as executive director of the Federal Steering Committee and architect with Mayor Dinkins' Office of Construction. Most recently, she was awarded a Loeb Fellowship from Harvard University to examine contemporary dilemmas in cultural storytelling and the built environment. Peggy King-Jorde's long and outstanding commitment to the African Burial ground initiated the involvement of New York's African American community and was a critical factor in their organizing efforts to preserve the site. For further information contact Ren'ee Miscione, GSA Public Affairs, (212) 264-0424

o **African Burial Ground Artifacts.** Dr. Warren Perry, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Central Connecticut State University, has been chosen as the Associate Director of Archaeology for the African Burial Ground Project. Dr. Perry is in charge of analyzing and interpreting the archaeological materials from the African Burial Ground at the Foley Square Archaeology Laboratory at 6 World Trade Ctr.

Currently all of the artifacts and other burial related items, such as the wood from the coffins and soil samples, are being stored at the laboratory. Some of the artifacts are being processed now (sorted, cleaned and cataloged). Dr. Perry will analyze these burial related artifacts, soil samples, coffin wood, stratigraphy and the spatial analysis of the burials. He will be looking at the relation of male, female and children within the burial ground, how they were buried, what they were buried with and coffin shapes and sizes. These mortuary practices will also be compared with other mortuary practices in the United States and Africa.

o **Media Watch: Slavery's Buried Past: The NY African Burial Ground** will air nationwide as an episode in the PBS science documentary series, "The New Explorers" on Wednesday, December 18, 1996, 8:00 pm (est).

---- E.B.

ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?
Please submit names and/or corrections to OPEI,
6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239
New York, New York 10048

AFRICAN AMERICAN BEGINNINGS -- Part 6 of 6

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D

The connection was tightly bound between the American Abolition movement of the post Revolutionary period and the goals of the nineteenth century American Colonization Society. The end of the American Revolution marked a period of increased rebellion and anti-slavery sentiment aimed at aiding enslaved persons in obtaining their freedom.

The new abolitionists of the 19th century differed from their predecessors in their approach, concerns, and tone. Early abolitionist efforts in America began during the mid 1700s with the primary aim of ending the transatlantic slave trade, rather than emancipating those enslaved in Colonial America. The early abolitionists had a gradualist, religious orientation and a certain southern tone, according to historian Benjamin Quarles. It was conciliatory in nature and had a colonizationist outlook. He noted: "Because they expected slavery to die out by slow degrees at some distant, unspecified date, the early abolitionists counseled Negroes to endure..." In their addresses to slave holders [they] used calm and temperate language, in line with their belief that a harsher tone would seem provocative. They avoided passionate denunciations or the reciting of atrocity stories.

Conciliatory to the core, the earlier generation of abolitionists seemed to go out of their way to win the love and esteem of the South" (Quarles 1969: 10-11). While Quakers are credited with taking the earliest leadership roles in publicly denouncing slavery, Africans were naturally involved in even earlier efforts to emancipate themselves.

Colonial period advocates for the emancipation of enslaved Africans included two Africans living in New England, Prince Hall, founder of Afro-American masonry in the U.S., and Abijah Prince, one of the founders of Sunterland, Vermont, along with a white Puritan judge — Samuel Seawell (Low & Clift 1981:789).

" This is our home, and this is our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers; for it, some of us fought, bled and died. Here we were born and here we will die." --- Mtg of African New Yorkers (1831)

By the end of the 18th century two major anti-slavery organizations existed in New York and Philadelphia. The New York Manumission Society, established by white male abolitionists in 1785, followed the lead of the Philadelphia based Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery established in 1775. Women and Africans were typically not allowed membership in these organizations.

According to historian Thelma Foote, the New York Manumission Society was "formed by such well-known figures as John Jay (its first president), Alexander Hamilton (second president), Chancellor Livingston, Phillip Schuyler, and Hector St. John de Crevecocer to encourage public support for abolition. The Society mediated indentureship negotiations and provided legal assistance to African Americans who were denied their freedom" (Foote 1995:2-3). The Society was not especially successful in these attempts. Their greatest success was the establishment of the African Free Schools. (See "African American Beginnings" Update Volume 1, No. 7). According to Low & Clift:

"An important aim of these early anti-slavery organizations was to provide education and employment to free blacks. These societies believed that as Afro-Americans were given an opportunity to demonstrate their intelligence and abilities, whites would look favorably upon some system of general emancipation. The societies tried therefore, to avoid a militant approach that would alienate potential friends" (Low & Clift 1981:789).

Along with the establishment of Sierra Leone in West Africa by British abolitionists in the late 18th century as a colony to resettle free Africans, came the notion of resettlement or "colonization" for free Africans living in America. In 1816 the American Colonization Society was formed with the chief goal of sending free African Americans back to Africa. Liberia was established as a receiving colony for African Americans. The threat of resettlement in Africa for many Africans living in early America was one that drew strong protest, particularly among those who viewed themselves as American nationalists, not as Africans. Most African Americans, note Low and Clift, "rejected the American Colonization Society on the grounds that it's philosophy of the removal of Africans was based on racial prejudice not benevolence" (1981:790).

Response to the colonization plan was promptly delivered by prominent African American leaders at Bethel Church in Philadelphia on January 25, 1817. The program's speakers included Richard Allen Bishop of the A.M.E. Church, Absalom Jones pastor of St. Thomas

→

Episcopal Church, wealthy shipbuilder James Forten and others. These men, held in high regard, encouraged the crowd to reject the colonization plan as "an unmerited stigma upon the Negro." They further vowed that "they would never voluntarily separate themselves from their brethren in slavery" (Quarles 1969:4). A committee was formed to act in the interests of free Africans who were choosing to remain in America.

For the next several decades this protest campaign was continued in Philadelphia as well as New York. For example, in 1830, Peter Williams Jr., pastor of St. Philips Church, then located on Centre Street, gave an address to an African American audience on the hypocrisy of the Fourth of July as it related to Africans, enslaved and free, living in America. The issue of colonization continued to be addressed as one forced upon free African Americans. Williams' noted: "We are *natives* of this country; we ask only to be treated as well as foreigners. Not a few of our fathers suffered and bled to purchase its independence; we ask only to be treated as well as those who fought against it." Williams' reminded his congregation that many of their relatives, including his father had fought for the American colonists and were now being rewarded with resettlement (Ripley 1991:4-7).

Williams' remarks were echoed a year later by the "New Abolitionists." These abolitionists included African New Yorkers who were viewed as "immediatists." Their objectives differed from the early abolitionists in that they no longer believed that the gradualist plan could be realized. William Lloyd Garrison, a converted white abolitionist who initially embraced and later renounced the colonization plan, was instrumental in influencing other white abolitionists to reject colonization and to support free Africans in their struggle for suffrage and other "inalienable" and civil rights. A statement made by a group of African Americans in 1831 at St. Philips, illustrates this point:

"We do not believe that things will always continue the same. The time must come when the Declaration of Independence will be felt in the heart, as well as uttered from the mouth and the rights of all shall be properly acknowledged and appreciated, God hasten that time. This is our home, and this is our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers; for it, some of us fought, bled and died. Here we were born and here we will die" (Mtg. of African American men 1831).

Paul Cuffee, African shipbuilder and merchant and John Russwurm, journalist and co-editor of Freedom's Journal, were the two most prominent men of African descent to embrace the colonization plan. Cuffee used his ship to relocate a number of families to Sierra Leone as early as 1814. Russwurm resigned as editor of Freedom's Journal and departed for Liberia in 1829, where he served as superintendent of schools.

The 1830s and 1840s witnessed a new beginning for African American abolitionists. As the gradualist approach was abandoned and a more radical immediatist plan adopted, the racially integrated American Anti-slavery Society was formed in 1833. The goals of the society were to advocate for the rights of free Africans as well as the enslaved. Its members included free Africans James Crummell, James Barbadoes, and Peter Williams, Jr.. William Lloyd Garrison and the Tappan Brothers (Lewis and Arthur) were also influential members. The 1830s and 1840s also witnessed a period of violent attacks on Africans and their white anti-slavery associates and supporters. Decisions to include women in "formal male," anti-slavery organizations split some of these societies.

Efforts to emancipate Africans in America, and to obtain the same "rights" afforded Europeans continued individually and collectively beyond the Civil War. Many maintain that efforts to obtain equality as free Africans living in America, still continues today.

Ed. Note: Part Six concludes this series of African American Beginnings. Look for Women, Suffrage and Anti-Slavery in the next issue of Update

Bibliographic Sources

Aptheker, Herbert. The Negro in the Abolitionist Movement. NY: Intl. Pubs., 1941.

Baker, Houston ed. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave. NY: Penguin Books, 1982.

Blassingame, John. ed. The Frederick Douglass Papers V 1. New Haven: YaleUniv. Press, 1979.

Bracey, J. H., August Meier & Elliot Rudwick eds. Blacks in the Abolitionist Movement. CA.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1971.

Katz, Wm. Loren. Eyewitness: A Living Documentary of the African American Contribution to American History. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

_____. The Westward Movement & Abolitionism 1815-1850. Austin, Tx.: Raintree Steck-Vaughn Pubs.

Lapansky, Phillip. "Graphic Discord: Abolitionist and Anti-Abolitionist Images." The Abolitionist Sisterhood. ed. by Yellen & Van Harve, 1994.

Litwack, Leon F. North of Slavery: The Negro In the Free States 1790 - 1860. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961.

Low, Augustus & Virgil Clift. Encyclopedia of Black America. NY: Da Capo Press Inc. 1981.

Pearce, Jane H. & William H. Pearce. They Who Would Be Free. NY: 1974.

Quarles, Benjamin. Black Abolitionists. NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969.

Ripley, C. Peter, ed. The Black Abolitionist Papers. Vols. III & IV. Chapel Hill:Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Staudenraus, P.J. The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865. NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1961

Sterling, Dorothy, ed. Speak Out in Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings by Black Northerners, 1787-1865., np, nd.

Issues In the Field: Notes on Oral History, Anthropology and African American Culture

Marie-Alice Devieux
and Ruth A. Mathis

Ever since the Federal Writers' Project interviews with [the formerly enslaved] in the 1930s, oral history has been about the fact that there's more to history than presidents and generals, and there's more to culture than the literary canon. Indeed, one of the reasons why oral history has been sometimes less than welcome in some circles is that it has disarranged many accepted truths — Alessandro Portelli

Stories often evoke images which stay with us long after the telling, becoming part of our consciousness. Each time we hear them, the images are motioned to life. A photograph, pieces of jewelry, a blanket are all material objects which may serve as tangible reinforcements of a story. So much so in fact, that the images, materials, and story are seamlessly embedded in our memory—the objects hold the story, the story speaks the object. The same holds true for other facets of culture—as varied as musical expression or gardening—they too, are connected to story. Sometimes, however the story and the object are separated, and we are left only with the images—stills of times and places for which we can no longer situate. We no longer know the story, but the images continue to haunt us (Tajiri:1991). Sometimes that story is forgotten, submerged, or deliberately erased and the context is lost (Passerini:1987; Tajiri, 1991; Fields 1994). Such is sometimes the case for researchers confronted with culture associated with African Americans and the omissions in the historical record of America, its historical interpretation and in the consequences for this misinterpretation.

In the case of the African Burial Ground, researchers are daunted by similar challenges. We may have the bones of our ancestors, but what were their thoughts? We may have their artifacts, their things, but what did they mean? Where did they live? How did their new environment shape them, and how did they in turn shape their environment? Are there stories— remnants of their lives—which linger, unfettered and undocumented but hidden in the drawers, family albums, or in the memories of their descendants just as they have been hidden in the ground? Making substantive use of oral sources in her forthcoming dissertation sociologist, Susan Pearce, discusses how "cemeteries are devoted to the cause memory. Specific burials are constructed to honor the wishes of the dead " (Pearce: 1996:32) . Memory then, is both a tangible and intangible territory.

Traditionally, archaeologists have looked at tangible artifacts for meanings and interpretations. Artifacts such as ceramics, glass, and iron works are excavated and studied. However, the artifacts that archaeologists study are a tiny portion of

those made by humans. What archaeologists don't see are the many perishable items that didn't survive the test of time, and have been left to the memories of descendants and survivors. These artifacts, clothing, quilts, paintings, musical instruments are not always represented in the **archaeological assemblage** and thus do not receive the same attention given to ceramics or glass. Archaeologists have traditionally studied the privileged and elite. Only within the last twenty years of a discipline that has been around for over 200 years have the lives of the oppressed and enslaved been studied.

Those interested in historical interpretation need to look at various mediums for an understanding of enslaved Africans and African American culture—the passing on of cultural and material traditions. Black cultural history, at least initially, is a migration saga lasting four centuries and involving [at least] 10,000,000 African people, 400,000 of whom ended up in the United States", (Vlach 1991: xiv). Enslaved Africans created a new culture as well as preserved cultural traditions of different ethnic groups. Heritage is represented in the textiles, folk songs, musical instruments, furniture, wood carvings, sculpture, grave markers, houses, and drawings not represented in the archaeological record. Studying the material culture is one method of "capturing" the legacy or memories of Africans in America. Oral history collection is another.

Oral histories, or recorded narratives, offer one opportunity to address certain historical gaps for which we have yet to interpret. Through community study, biography, and family research projects to name a few arenas of search, important questions concerning the contexts of African American culture may begin to illuminate the complexities of meaning for participants. Far from just a series of questions on an interesting topic, useful in-depth interviews are thoroughly researched, have a theoretical foundation, and of course present their own set of research issues.(see Vansina:1985; Fisch:1990; Grele: 1991; Portelli:1991; Yow: 1994) Given the methodology of interviewing several sources, narrators and researchers, are able to offer a comprehensive view of the past. As the writer of the opening quotation aptly notes, once oral sources were tapped for an understanding of slavery from the viewpoint of the enslaved, the history of slavery in America had to begin to be rewritten (Portelli: 1991: viii). Our recollections offer not only insights into what happened, but they offer clues to the impact of certain historical events; events which traditional historical methods may overlook.

In her discussion of genealogy and anthropology (Penn: 1991) and in her

Cont. on page 14

COMMUNITY VOICES

Compiled by Chadra D. Pittman

For this issue we asked our readers the following question: What strategies do you think should be used to incorporate the historical findings of the African Burial Ground into New York City's public school curriculum ?

Martia Goodson - Professor Black & Puerto Rican Studies, Baruch College, New York, N.Y.

In my opinion, the Board of Education is impenetrable. This view makes it difficult to imagine how the African Burial Ground might get into the public school curriculum. Since, I believe, that teacher education is the key, perhaps the OPE! Educators Symposia might be expanded or go "on the road" to schools and places where teachers gather. Also, it wouldn't hurt if the Chancellor was educated about the African Burial Ground. On an individual school basis, Carter G. Woodson Clubs might be organized with a special emphasis on New York City history. They could make the historical findings of the ABG study an integral part of the club's activities. These don't get the ABG into the curriculum, but it educates important people about the ABG.

Phyllis Murray - Educator/Author, Scarsdale, New York

The uncovering of the African Burial Ground in Manhattan must serve as an impetus to effect change within the existing historical texts, literature and curricula. The remains and artifacts from the site and subsequent research, speak to the urgent need to put the true and therefore accurate history of the enslaved Africans of the North in perspective. Fortunately we have the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground in Manhattan. The information this office provides via lecture and printed matter, can inspire both teacher and student to become involved in one of the most important archeological finds of this century. And as students write on the events which surround the discovery of the African Burial Ground, new literature is created in a variety of genres as well as a keener understanding of a people who were also forgotten. If we can not re-write curricula to reflect a true picture of the enslaved Africans of the North today, we must entrust this duty to our youth. But ... we must teach them well.

Michael Hooper- Community School District 16, New York, NY

Some strategies for incorporating the findings of the ABG into the public school curriculum are as follows: **1.** City-wide workshops through the Office of Curriculum and Instruction (Language Arts, Social Studies and Multi-cultural Education to be included) School Districts, Special education and the High School Division to all participants) **2.** District-wide staff development in designated districts for each borough **3.** Pilot projects in individual schools **4.** Collaboration with community based organizations for eg. Brooklyn Navy Yard, Sandy Grounds, Schomburg Center, Weeksville) as well as colleges and museums. **5.** Production of instructional materials, e.g. archeological notebooks, genealogical charts, photo journals etc.

Earlene Jones - Concerned Citizen, Rockaway, NY

First of all, we need to realize as a community, voting is essential to changing the curriculum in public schools and everything else that's wrong with this city! I personally think that what's being taught is damaging to Black and Latino children. Understanding how community school boards work and becoming a member is one of the ways we can change the curriculum. Also, organized groups that place members of their own community in key positions on the school boards have a better chance to change its curriculum. Making sure that the history of our ancestors is available to our children is not something we can leave to someone else. Its our responsibility to become an active part of that change.

Betty Davis - Assist. Principal for Administration, Clara Barton H.S., Bklyn., NY

I feel strongly that the historical findings of the African Burial Ground should be infused in all curriculum areas. The whole economy of the United States is based on the bones of the people that are interred in the Burial Ground. We could develop a mathematical equation for the students to solve with regards to the enormous profit that America made, with the hundreds of years of forced free labor ? The students could calculate what the wages of the enslaved Africans might have been further showing how the government capitalized on African peoples. In the field of English, students could research "slave" narratives dating to the period in time when the burial ground was in use to get some insight into the lives and personal accounts of these ancestors who were instrumental in the building of this nation. In the area of journalism, students could research journals and newspapers of the day, looking for ways in which slavery was discussed and dealt with in Colonial New York. With regards to Social Studies and History, we need to introduce the idea of the Holocaust to the curriculum. Fusing History along with Anthropology, students could do comparative analysis' of the African American and Native American Holocausts of the 18th Century in Colonial New York. Overlapping with science, students could research the ways in which one could go about looking for burial grounds.

Mustapha Williams - Community Activist, Bronx, NY

What we need to do is reignite the community with regards to recommitting themselves to the African Burial Ground and to our ancestors. Once the skeletal remains of our ancestors had been shipped off to Howard University, the community became complacent. We felt secure that Howard University would treat the skeletal remains with respect and dignity, and would return to us vital information about the African contributions to the Americas. We need to rededicate ourselves and spread the word about the historical findings of the project. We owe it to our ancestors to flood the Board of Education with phone calls and letters demanding that the curriculum include African people. We need to organize subcommittees to contact the Board of Ed to find out the process of incorporating new information into the school curriculum, as well as out reach to teachers to stress the importance of incorporating this information. Our ancestors came up for a reason. It is time for their true history to be told.

Foley Square Lab Report:

THE FATHER MATHEW CUP FROM FIVE POINTS: THE MAN BEHIND THE CUP

Tamara Kelly

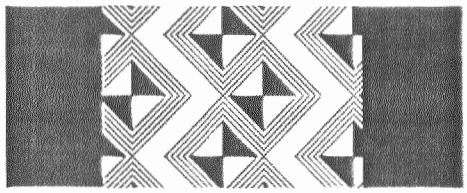
Part II: Father Mathew and the Abolitionists

While visiting Massachusetts, Father Mathew was drawn into controversy. Years before his trip to the United States, Father Mathew signed an address which stated that the Irish in Ireland would support the abolitionists in the States by doing all that they could to oppose slavery. The abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, sent Father Mathew an "invitation to a function at Worcester to commemorate the abolition of slavery in the West Indies" (Kerrigan 1992:106).

Father Mathew declined, stating that his primary reason for coming to America was to spread his temperance message. When Garrison stated that Father Mathew could do both, he restated his primary reason for coming to America and said that he did not know if the Bible said anything against slavery. Garrison warned him that when he traveled to the South he would meet Catholic priests and laymen who were slave owners and slaveholders. But Father Mathew did not let Garrison's warning stand in his way. Garrison, who was also the editor of an abolitionist newspaper entitled The Liberator, published a "detailed account of their conversation" blatantly criticizing Father Mathew's views (Kerrigan 1992:106). Some Northerners, and the majority of Southerners, condemned Garrison for what he did. But other abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass, who had taken the pledge from Father Mathew in 1845 when he visited Ireland, were also displeased with him (Kerrigan 1992:110).

Douglass and many other abolitionists began to view Father Mathew as a hypocrite and some of them even suggested that Father Mathew supported slaveholders. They felt that because he did not speak out against slavery he would send the message to the Irish in Ireland that slavery was acceptable and that there was nothing morally wrong with it (Kerrigan 1992:112).

If Father Mathew's views did not sit well with abolitionists, they also did not sit well with some Southern politicians.



The governor of Georgia, who was also the president of the state's Temperance Society, asked Father Mathew if he really did agree with the abolitionist ideas he had previously supported.

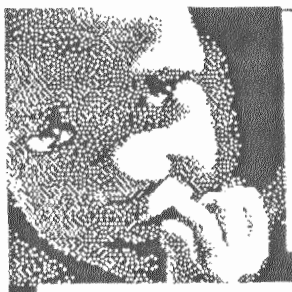
When Father Mathew's answer did not suffice, he withdrew an invitation to visit Georgia. However, after telling the governor that "he had no intention of interfering with American institutions" his reply was well received (Kerrigan 1992:113). In 1849 Father Mathew was invited to take a seat inside the United States House of Representatives. When it was suggested that he take a seat inside the Senate, there was some opposition by senators from the North and South primarily because of the controversy surrounding his feelings about slavery. In the end he was allowed to sit in on some of the meetings because of his great dedication to temperance, and he was even invited to dinner by President Taylor, a slaveholder (Kerrigan 1992:113).

Eventually he fell into good graces with the rest of the Southern states, but the majority of Northern abolitionists continued to blast him, on what to them was Father Mathew's betrayal, which would never be redeemable or forgotten.

Father Mathew left New York for Ireland in 1851. After two and a half years in the United States he was still in failing health, yet managed to visit 25 states. He administered the pledge in "over 300 of the principal towns and cities," and added more than 500,000 people to his temperance roll (U.S. Catholic Historical Society 1911:112).

He died in Cork, Ireland on December 8, 1856, and "over 50,000 people took part in the funeral procession" (U.S. Catholic Historical Society 1911:113). In Cork a monument was erected in his honor in 1864. The Capuchins, a Catholic order of priests in Ireland, were not able to keep the movement going with great zeal like Father Mathew had, but on October 11, 1905, bishops in Ireland "commissioned the Capuchins to preach anew the Temperance Crusade throughout the country" (U.S. Catholic Historical Society 1911:114). Since then the Capuchins have continued to spread the temperance message wherever they go.

NOTE:
Bibliographic Sources for "The Father Mathews Cup" appeared in Update No. 11



EDUCATORS' SYMPOSIUM 1996:
Teaching Our Children about the African Burial Ground

Text: Emilyn L. Brown
Photos: Tamara R. Jubilee

" Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm, look for me all around you, for with God's grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of [enslaved Africans] who have died in America and the West Indies, and the millions in Africa..."

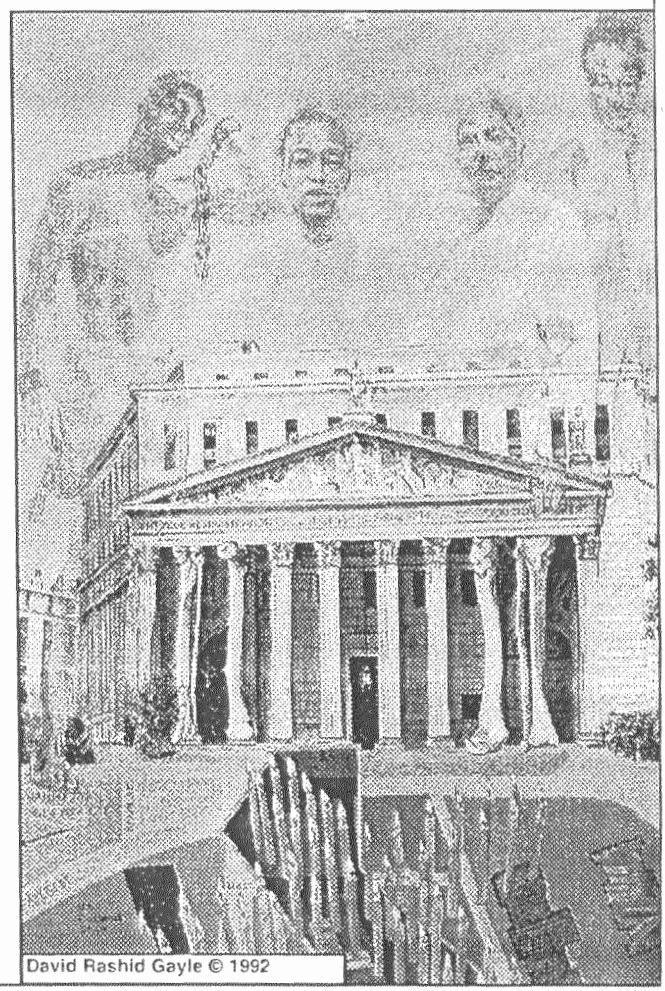
Spoken more than 70 years ago from an Atlanta prisson, **Marcus Garvey's** words still resonate with the ideal of cultural continuity. One of the primary tools used by OPEI to further this ideal has been educating the public about the African Burial Ground. With that in mind, the organizing theme for our summer Educators Symposium became *"How Do We Teach Our Children About the African Burial Ground?"*

This year, the day long event happened to coincide with Garvey's August 17th birth date. Following a prayer vigil at the site, attendees assembled at our 6 WTC location to hear a key note address by Dr. Warren Perry, who recently joined the Project as the Associate Director of Archaeology. Dr. Perry's responsibilities include the archaeological analysis and interpretation of artifacts recovered from the African Burial Ground.

The first thematic workshop was facilitated by Amal Muhammad, an early activist in the struggle to preserve the site. Over the past few years, Amal's collaboration with artist David Gayle has resulted in his work the*"African Burial Ground,"* (1992) appearing at numerous exhibits, including Savacou Gallery, Queens College, and Howard University.

Amal led an in depth discussion involving various features of Gayle's work, an acrylic painting and collage on board. The first known artwork to commemorate the site, its highly symbolic images include a Centre Street courthouse supported by the bones of African ancestors.

Dr. Warren Perry, Associate Director of Archaeology of the African Burial Ground Project.



David Rashid Gayle © 1992

Barbara Muniz of the Black American Roots Society

Amal Muhammad (left) fields questions about Gayle's artowk. Deborah A. Wright, OPEI Volunteer Coordinator, adds to the discussion. Gayle's work appears to the right.

Barbara Muniz (pictured above) is a founding member of the Black American Roots Society, a non-profit group that travels to public schools throughout New York City to offer presentations which instill racial pride. She is also a former OPEI public educator. In her presentation and display of "Collectibles" Barbara reinforced the idea of using ordinary, commonplace artifacts to provide a window to the past.

Having successfully explored some of the creative ways to teach children about New York City's African past, OPEI would like to take this opportunity to thank the educators, parents and concerned citizens who participated in this year's symposium.

Above: As part of OPEI's ongoing tours, and presentations, Public Educator Ama Badu Boakyewa discusses burial artifacts with attendees right.

Continued from page 9

ongoing work on lynching culture and African American communities (Penn: 1995), anthropologist, MaryKay Penn, illustrates the potential for recorded narratives in such instances. Penn was once contacted by a woman from the American west whose uncle had been lynched when he was 19 years old. Her father, who at the time was also a young man, was away in the military at the time of her uncle's murder. He never recovered from the guilt he felt for not having been present to protect his younger brother. In fact it was the woman's belief, given the shroud of silence which surrounded this incident, that her father's ability to parent her and her siblings was greatly affected by this tragedy. This occurrence if taken as a singular event could be seen as one family's unfortunate experience. However lynching, which is a mob actioned death without legal sanction, is a phenomenon which is part of a larger historical context and has been documented since the 1700s. It affected thousands of families at a time who were forced to leave their homes or towns for fear of being lynch-ed. Who were these young people and their families? What 'crime' if any, were they accused of committing? Where did they go? Was there any safe place? Who were their lynchers? Who if anyone tried to stop it from happening? Just as importantly, Penn asks, how much do we understand about its meaning historically? From an anthropological perspective the question could be: how did this shared experience, and the consciousness of lynching shape the culture which African Americans would subsequently create for generations to come? These are the types of questions which oral history projects can attempt to answer.

Because a main source for acquiring oral history is dependent on memory, researchers are correct to point to the possibility of factual inaccuracies as a legitimate challenge. This confirms the necessity for all research to be grounded in exhaustive background research of the subject, on the issues of choosing appropriate narrators and the role of the researcher in shaping the narrative (Frisch: 1990; Portelli: 1991; Yow: 1994). Conversely, many written, documented sources have been proved if not wrong, then at least inaccurate. This notwithstanding, sometimes inaccuracies may also be clues to meaning. In his groundbreaking work on form and meaning in oral history, Allesandro Portelli, discovered that certain "errors" in his narrators testimonies were too consistent to be dismissed solely as meaningless inaccuracies (Portelli:1991).

Originally in search of Italian work songs and their connection to political movements in Italy, Portelli, stumbled upon the story of a young steel worker, Luigi Trastulli. Trastulli was killed on a street by police as he and other workers left a factory to participate in an anti-NATO protest in 1949. Narrators often placed Trastulli death at a factory wall following a mass worker layoff in 1953. Portelli consulted members of conservative, communist, and mainstream sources both documented and oral. The incident lasted "less than thirty minutes but from that moment on, the memory of this brief episode...exerted a shaping influence of the town's identity and culture." Portelli soon realized that the consistency of their stories was a key to their collective memory (a young man's unwarranted and unavenged death) and therefore the community's subsequent actions from the day of Trastulli's death forward.

Portelli's research like Penn's, actively addresses the need for a comprehensive view of historical events—including a number of possible interpretations to understand the past. Like interviewing witnesses to an accident, each individual will describe the accident from a different perspective, sometimes illuminating in the process their own interests, emotional responses, and frames of reference. Portelli, is also astute to note that many documents on which we rely for factual accuracy, are also derived from oral sources (Portelli:1991:51). Birth records, marriage certificates, census records, newspaper items, etc are all dependent on human responses to human inquiry. They are therefore subject to human inaccuracies which may be intentional or not. They too then are cultural products subject to meaning and interpretation.

Historical archaeologists are presently thinking of new ways of viewing historical groups, particularly enslaved African Americans addressing issues of domination and resistance, inequality and self-determination (Paynter & McGuire 1991; Ferguson 1992; Orser 1996). However, archaeologists are still struggling with a peripheral vision of the captives' world as opposed to the central vision that the Africans themselves held. This is similar to the traditional **emic/etic** or insider/outsider issues that anthropologists struggle with.

Currently, archaeologists are working from an etic viewpoint; they acquire their knowledge through observation. Ideally archaeologists should also be working within an emic view; seeing the creation and function of material objects as creative moments within a certain social context (Hodder:1989). One way archaeologists are attempting to get an internal view is through inter-disciplinary study; by inviting non-archaeologists to engage in interpretations, offering new insights and ideas as well as looking at the history of archaeology itself: a discipline that has/is largely controlled by European males.

Sites like the African Burial Ground are really the beginnings of African people engaging in debates about the construction and production of archaeological knowledge as well as the veneration of their ancestors (Devieux:1995; LaRoche & Blakey:1996). The active involvement of community descendants and "their seizing of intellectual control" demonstrates that anthropological and archaeo-

→

logical methodology should be a dialogue; a conversation between people not a monologue that merely represents the scientist's viewpoint (LaRoche & Blakey: 1996).

The larger community should be able to hear the voices of the enslaved people of the past not simply the interpreter's voice, whether she is a historian, anthropologist or specifically, an archaeologist. It is difficult for archaeologists to do this because they deal with material objects that cannot speak and second-hand sources (such as census records, newspaper articles, deeds) that represent the "facts" of the past. Sometimes these historical documents either mute or distort the voices of the people, particularly when they are written by outsiders observing events (such as European colonists describing the burial customs of enslaved Africans). Sometimes archaeologists miss the cultural texture that artifacts may hold. Are the broken pieces of glass on top of graves just broken pieces of glass or do they represent the belongings of the deceased? Are they broken by the test of time or were they intentionally broken to represent that a life has ended? The meanings/ ideas behind the artifact are hidden. There can even be multiple meanings, sometimes contradictory to one another, all surrounding a single artifact (Tilley: 1989).

Finally, are material objects at the edge of meaning? How does a material object capture the spirituality of its creator/owner? Spirituality is a phenomena that can not be placed in the hand. You cannot taste or smell, see or touch it. It is beyond the realm of the temporal and physical. What we see when we view objects such as Sankofa symbols or a crucifix, is the interpretation of the idea of spirituality. The essence, the meaning it held for the owner is not preserved. It is everywhere and nowhere.

The social conditions of the present influence both what archaeological data are regarded as important and how they are interpreted [see Trigger:1989]. Archaeology is as much about the present as it is about the past. Political freedom, economic struggle, gender equity, and racism shape the questions and thinkings about past people and events. The political changes of the 1960s in the United States inspired people to review African American history. Historians and sociologists began to look at Black culture beyond that of "pathological" or "deviant" in the face of white society [see Singleton 1985; Vlach 1991]. The political upheavals have produced what Devieux referred to as a "culture of claiming" in a preliminary oral history of the New York African Burial Ground descendant community. The profound connection of African Americans to their ancestors moves beyond the symbolic and is in many ways quite literal (Devieux:1995). LaRoche and Blakey elaborate on the significance for researchers:

> Entrenched, long held philosophical positions of power are not easily relinquished and new perspectives are often difficult for scholars to develop or embrace without dialogue or outside influence. As the changing archaeological perspective weds archaeological findings with interdisciplinary research and oral history, perhaps scholars outside the discipline may begin to access and find relevance in the body of work produced by our efforts (LaRoche & Blakey:1996:20).

Finally, to quote from archaeologist, Christopher Tilley, "there will be no correct stories of the past that are not themselves a product of a politic of truth. There can only be better or worse representations of history." Toward the former--a better representation -- through oral histories collected from a variety of sources, potentially offer a valuable contribution.

Bibliographic Sources (Partial Listing)

Devieux, Marie-Alice. "We Are Our Own Ancestors: Claiming Meaning for the African Burial Ground 'Descendant' Community," American Anthropology Association Annual Meeting, 1995

Ferguson, L. Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800. Smithsonian Institution, 1992

See Fields, and Blight in Fabre, Genevieve and Robert O'Meally ed. History and Memory in African-American Culture. New York Oxford: 1994

Grele, Ronald J. Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History. Greenwood Publishing Group, New York: 1991

Hodder, I. "Post-modernism, Post-structuralism and Post-processual Archaeology." In The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression. Ed. by I. Hodder. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989

LaRoche, Cheryl J. and Michael L. Blakey. "Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground." Historical Archaeology. In Press

Melas, E. M. "Etics, Emics and Empathy in Archaeological Theory." In The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression. Edited by I. Hodder. London: Unwin Hyman. pp. 137-154, 1989.

McGuire, R. H. and R. Paynter, eds. The Archaeology of Inequality. Oxford: Blackwell. 1991

Orser, C.E. Jr. Historical Archaeology of the Modern World. Plenum Books, 1996

Passerini, Louisa Facism in Popular Memory. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press: 1987

Pearce, Susan C. "Africans On This Soil: Disturbed New York Burials, Disturbing American Memories." Unpub. diss.

Penn, MaryKay. "Where Anthropology Meets Genealogy." African-American Genealogy and Historical Society Conference, Schomburg Center for Research New York, 1991.

Penn, MaryKay. Personal comm. Jan.1995

Portelli, Alessandro. The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History. State Univ. N.Y. Press, Albany: 1991

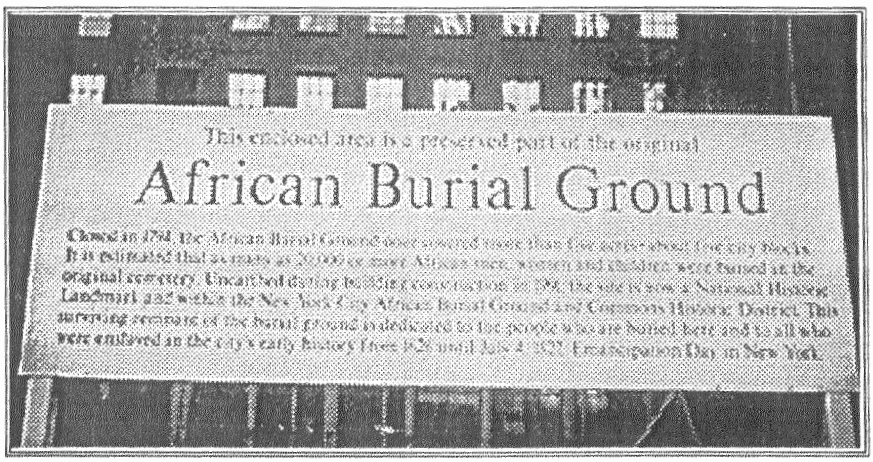
Singelton, T. A,. Ed. The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life. Academic Press, Inc., 1985

Thanks to Cheryl J. LaRoche and Emilyn L. Brown for their assisstance in creating this article.

In The Next Issue of Update:

- **Women, Suffrage and Anti-Slavery**
- **Howard Univ. Interview Pt. II**
- **An Update on the Artifacts from the African Burial Ground**

ADDRESS


This enclosed area is a preserved part of the original
African Burial Ground